U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

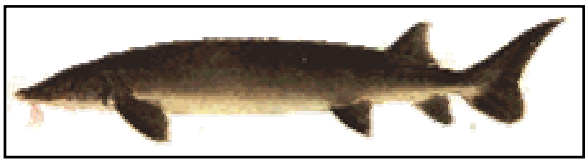
Alpena FRO Participates in Lake Whitefish Distribution Study in Lake Huron

In November 2003, staff from the Alpena FRO participated in a joint study with Michigan DNR (MDNR) to assess efficiency of various sized trap nets on lake whitefish spawning grounds adjacent to Alpena. The Fall 2003 work was a pilot project for a 3 year long USFWS Restoration Act funded lakewide lake whitefish distribution study slated to begin in Fall 2004. The goal of the pilot project was to determine if small trap nets could efficiently capture sufficient numbers of lake whitefish for the 2004-06 mark/recapture study. From 2004 to 2006, the study plan calls for USFWS and MDNR to tag and release 3,000 lake whitefish annually in the Alpena area. Fishery Biologists Aaron Woldt, Scott Koproski, Adam Kowalski, and Tracy Hill set two 6' high trap nets and one 4' high trap net near South Ninemile Point, north of Alpena. The 3 nets also had varying sized throat openings (12 to 18"). We varied throat size in an attempt to determine an optimum size that balanced trap avoidance and trap escape. Staff from MDNR's Alpena Fisheries Research Station set 3 similar nets on known lake whitefish spawning grounds in Thunder Bay as well. Inclement weather with higher and more frequent winds than normal hampered sampling attempts. Service personnel were only able to complete 8 lifts before a 10 day long storm event in early November, including 2 gales with winds over 35 knots, severely damaged all 3 nets. MDNR personnel were able to fish until mid-November due to protection from prevailing winds inside Thunder Bay. In general, catch rates of lake whitefish in all nets were low. Nets with the smaller sized throat openings (12") seemed to have higher catch rates than nets with the larger openings, but sample sizes were small. Due to low catch rates in the small nets and their vulnerability to weather events, it is apparent that sampling efforts in 2004 to 2006 must include contracting with commercial fishers who use much larger pots (20' wide X 10' high). We will also experiment with fishing a large net bought specifically for this study (20' X 10'). This large net was not fished this year due to logistic concerns and inexperience with fishing such large gear. Data collected in this pilot study will improve study methodologies and help partners understand lakewide lake whitefish movement dynamics and spawning activity. Results of the 2004-06 study will be used to implement a movement matrix in statistical-catch-at-age models used to set annual lake whitefish harvest limits in 1836 Treaty waters. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities.

Aaron P. Woldt

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Announcement of Lake Sturgeon Spawning Reef at Belle Isle in the Detroit River



Fishery Biologist James Boase was in attendance at the official announcement of the construction of the lake sturgeon spawning reef at Belle Isle on the Detroit River. The announcement was attended by dignitaries from Windsor, Detroit, local media, interested businesses, federal and state biologists, and private citizens. Boase presented two posters depicting the collaborative efforts by researchers from the Alpena FRO and the U.S. Geological Survey (Great Lakes Science Center) involving lake sturgeon in the Detroit River. One poster showed the results of the pre-construction survey (spring 2003) of the proposed reef site. The second poster showed how the artificial reef was to be constructed. Questions from reporters from the Detroit News, Detroit Free Press and the Mayor of Detroit Staff were answered. In addition, one local radio station (WWJ AM 950) aired segments of the interview with Boase. Major contributors for this project include; Michigan Sea Grant, USEPA, US Army Corps of Engineers, USGS, Michigan DNR, Michigan DEQ, Great Lakes Fishery Trust, the City of Detroit, and Detroit Edison. If successful this project will not only be the first artificial spawning reef constructed in the Great Lakes specifically for lake sturgeon, but will also serve as a demonstration of a partnership effort working for the common good of a listed species. This event provided a unique opportunity to showcase established partnerships with state, federal, and non-governmental agencies. This demonstration effort provides a tangible example of how multiple federal agencies working with non-government organizations can pool resources to effectively and efficiently make positive change. In addition, this event provided an opportunity to explain the Service's mission and our efforts to restore native fish in this region and its application to other locations around the Great Lakes.

James C. Boase

Partnerships and Accountability

Formation of Huron Pines Resource, Conservation & Development River Fund

RC&D
Resource Conservation and Development

The Huron Pines Resource, Conservation & Development (RC&D) River Fund is an endowment fund that is in the first stages of development. This fund is being created with the purpose of sustaining long-term watershed protection and habitat improvement work in the Northeast Michigan region (11 counties of Huron Pines service area). “Soft funding” to support watershed restoration groups is unpredictable, and is subject to rapid change. This fund would allow restoration groups to have a steady supply of funds to assist their endeavors. Many entities are involved with the creation of this endowment to ensure its use will be flexible, and meet the needs of local partners. Partners include the State of Michigan [Michigan DNR, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)], Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA), many of the local watershed restoration committees, local conservation organizations, and private landowners. Alpena FRO Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator, Heather Enterline is

serving on the steering committee for the River Fund to assist in the process because ultimately this fund will become a resource for a wide range of watershed restoration activities in Northeastern Michigan. The first meeting of the steering committee was held November 6, 2003 at the MDEQ office in Gaylord, MI. This endowment fund is designed so private individuals (or businesses) that would like to invest in cleaner water and healthier watersheds in Northeastern Michigan have a way to support these watersheds on a long-term basis. Interest earned on the principle of the endowment fund will be distributed to watersheds for habitat restoration projects.

Heather L. Enterline

Lake Sturgeon Committee Conference Call

Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill participated in a conference call of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team Lake Sturgeon Committee in November. The purpose for the call was to finalize the 2004 Action Plan for the Lake Sturgeon Committee, begin planning for the next Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Workshop, prioritize flex fund projects for submission through the Basin Team, and finalize document review for the 2002 Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Workshop. Through the Lake Sturgeon Committee over 40 partnerships have been formed between federal and state agencies, tribal governments, Canadian agencies, academic institutions, commercial fishers, sport anglers, private organizations and individuals in order to conserve, protect and enhance lake sturgeon populations across the Great Lakes Basin. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices throughout the Great Lakes are working together with other partners to better understand the lake sturgeon's unique life history and meet rehabilitation challenges. Participation in the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem teams allows the staff at the Alpena FRO to assist the Service with fulfilling its partnership goal of working with partners and other Service programs to develop collaborative conservation strategies for aquatic species, specifically lake sturgeon in this case.

Tracy D. Hill

Michigan Sea Grant Strategic Planning Forum

Alpena FRO participated in a strategic planning forum hosted by Michigan Sea Grant that provided an overview of their draft strategic plan and to solicit input on issues. The meeting was held in Mackinaw City, Michigan on December 3, 2003. Participants included representatives from CORA, Michigan DNR, Mackinaw City Parks, Michigan Bait Dealers, and many others. New issues of perceived importance to Sea Grant's mission were identified and ranked by participants. Michigan Sea Grant is currently partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in many areas including fish passage and aquatic nuisance species. Partnerships are important to Service activities and a key element in the Service's Fishery Program Vision. Our partnership with Michigan Sea Grant and other federal agencies is important to Service operations and a key element of the Service's Fishery Program Vision.

Anjanette K. Bowen

Public Use

Southgate Anderson High School Students Learn About Lake Sturgeon

Fishery Biologist James Boase traveled to Southgate, Michigan on December 8, 2003 to present information about the lake sturgeon recovery efforts taking place in the Detroit River. Students from Southgate Anderson High School were shown a 20 minute Power Point presentation and then were introduced to an array of field sampling gear. During both segments of the presentation a series of questions were given to engage the students and demonstrate how development in southeast Michigan has impacted lake sturgeon rehabilitation efforts. The two main points presented were how pollution and habitat loss in the Detroit River has severely impacted this species. In addition, information was presented about why the corridor connecting Lake Huron to Lake Erie is vital to lake sturgeon survival. The 50 minute presentation was attended by five environmental biology classes for a total of approximately 95 students. The forum was an excellent opportunity to explain how the Alpena FRO is working with state and local governing bodies as well as private citizens in an effort to rehabilitate lake sturgeon populations throughout the Great lakes. This presentation provided an excellent opportunity to explain to the public the Service's mission and efforts to restore native fish. Specifically, the presentation focused on efforts to rehabilitate lake sturgeon populations in the Great Lakes and the role that the Fishery Resources Offices have in this endeavor. The benefits of native species restoration were clearly defined and explained. The presentation was also an excellent outreach opportunity.

James C. Boase

Fisheries Stepdown Planning with Ohio Division of Wildlife

Project Leader McClain traveled to Columbus, Ohio on November 4 to participate in a regional stepdown planning meeting with Fisheries staff of the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW) on November 5. This was meeting part of a strategic planning process to enhance partnership efforts for effective management of Great Lakes fisheries and aquatic resources. Highlights of the meeting included an in depth review of ODOW fisheries program structure and a review of the Service's new Fisheries Vision for the Future. Opportunities for collaborative projects were examined as well as tactics to enhance communication between the two agencies. In addition to McClain, Service staff participating in the meeting included Gerry Jackson, Bob Adair and Mike Hoff of the Regional Office, Terry Morse representing the Sea Lamprey Control Program and Rick Nelson from the La Crosse Fish Health Center. Strategic planning for the future of the Service's Fisheries program requires enhanced efforts for partnering with state, tribal and local governments as well as NGOs to pursue collaboration and cooperation. Meetings such as this will improve partnerships and benefit the fisheries and aquatic resources of the Great Lakes region.

Jerry R. McClain

Leadership in Science and Technology

Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team Web Update Presentation

Anjanette Bowen of the Alpena FRO provided a brief presentation on updates made to the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team web site (http://greatlakes.fws.gov) during the November 19-20 meeting of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team held in Chicago, Illinois. Web changes were made to better reflect emerging issues and priorities within the team - including the addition of migratory birds, endangered species, and coastal habitat restoration web pages. The site has had over 221,067 hits (21,348 visitors) in 2003, with 32,781 hits (2,929 users) in October 2003 alone. The presentation was given via web conferencing provided by MCI. Outreach, coordination, and partnerships between Great Lakes agencies are important for resource preservation and are key elements of the Service's mission and the Fishery Program's Vision.

Anjanette K. Bowen

Fish Passage Decision Support System Tested with Northeast Michigan Barriers

In November, Biologist Wells reviewed the Fish Passage Decision Support System (FPDSS). This system was designed to be an interactive method of obtaining and entering information on barriers throughout the United States as a key component of the National Fish Passage Program. Wells tested the system by entering numerous barriers from Northeast Michigan into the system. After a week of reviewing the system, a write up of findings was submitted to the National and Regional Fish Passage Coordinators. A few problems were discovered and improvements suggested. Overall the system is an excellent tool for resource managers, biologists, and policy makers. It will be an indispensable tool once fully operation. This is an example of interagency collaboration to improve information sharing of resources. The FPDSS will allow agencies to use scientific evidence to support their decisions on resource policies and restoration activities. Once completed, this project will benefit numerous public and private agencies across the United States including the Service.

Susan E. Wells

Workforce Management

Alpena Gillnet Repair

During the month of November, Fishery Biologists Adam Kowalski and Scott Koproski mended approximately 3,600 ft of assessment gillnet. These nets consist of 100 ft panels of 2 to 6” stretch mesh strung in 1/2” increments and are used by the Alpena FRO for the annual fishery independent lake whitefish assessment in 1836 Treaty waters. Mending consists of inspecting every net for holes, broken floats, and broken ties. Holes are repaired by either sewing in new twine across gaps or by replacing large holes with new sections of net. If nets are damaged beyond repair, replacement nets are built. Net repair is very important for collecting accurate and consistent data during our annual fisheries assessments. Nets must be strung similarly and repaired to the same standard each year to assure consistent gear selectivity across sampling years. Net repair and construction will continue throughout the winter until spring assessments start. Gillnets are used by the

Alpena FRO from spring through fall for lake whitefish and lake trout population assessments in Lake Huron. Lake whitefish and lake trout are native species harvested in both state and tribal commercial and sport fisheries. These population assessments are part of the Service's goal to maintain self-sustaining populations of native fish and much of the work is required for implementation of the 2000 Consent Decree.

Adam T. Kowalski

Alpena FRO Trap Net Repairs

In Fall 2003, Alpena FRO staff began pilot work on an inter-agency, lake-wide distribution study for lake whitefish in Lake Huron to assess gear effectiveness at known spawning locations. Three small trap nets with 4-6' pots were fished within 200 yards of the beach at South Nine mile Point just north of Alpena. Due to inclement weather which included at least 2 storms with gale force winds over a 10 day period, the small trap nets fished by the Alpena FRO were damaged quite extensively. Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski began mending the badly damaged nets during the month of November. Holes were ripped in the pots of the small trap nets, lead lines on the leads were parted, and entire panels of twine from the leads were lost. In addition to twine being damaged, the pipes used to maintain the shape of the pots while fishing were also lost during the November gales. Koproski spent approximately two weeks repairing the damaged nets. The work included mending holes in the pots and leads, and a local fabrication shop was hired to make new pipes which Koproski secured to the nets. Some of the leads used during the project will have to be removed from service due to excessive damage. Considering the severity of the gales and their duration, Alpena FRO staff was lucky to find the nets and fortunate that damage to the nets was not worse. The mended trap nets were used by the Alpena FRO during the pilot year of a lake-wide distribution study for lake whitefish in Lake Huron. Lake whitefish are an important native species in Lake Huron and are utilized by both commercial and recreational fishers. Data collected in this study will allow resource agencies to better manage this valuable species.

Scott R. Koproski